

SALLY PRUE and the ZABAGLIONE



BY ELISE WILLIAMSON.

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"NOW, Ned, tell us, who is Rollino?" I demanded.

"And how did you know about him?" asked Mary Maxwell.

"And how far is the place from here?" cried Ned. "I hope it is miles away. I simply adore to ride in a taxicab."

"One poor man," groaned Ned, "against so many?"

"Oh, tell us, Ned; I am all ears!"

"Well, once upon a time," began Ned, solemnly, "I was in Paris."

"This promises to be interesting," laughed Mary Maxwell.

"And I went to the Hotel Grande to dine. I had a most particular reason in wishing to dine at the Hotel Grande."

"One always does have—in Paris," murmured Mary Maxwell.

"At the Hotel Grande," Ned continued, undisturbed, "because of one Rollino, chef in chief, artist and philosopher, who had gathered all his poesy and wisdom into a divine liquid, fit only for the gods, but served for the delectation of man at the Hotel Grande."

"But it was in Paris that I had occasion to know Rollino. There was a certain artists' club to which a friend of mine belonged. The very one who has his studio in Macdougall alley, where we will go later. I used to go with this friend to little dinners at the club on red letter days when Rollino had consented to act as chef! Oh, those culinary masterpieces! There is but one Rollino! And having prepared the dinner he would sit with us at table in the queer little black skull cap he always wore and the big chef's apron and hold his own with the repartee, too."

"He speaks several languages, has served in the Italian army as an officer, and went on tour around the world with the suite of the present King of Italy, then Prince of Naples, in the rôle of head steward, master of ceremonies, chef in chief—in a word, just Rollino."

"Ned, this enthusiasm from you is most unusual." "Just you wait and see," Ned admonished. "If ever there was a man with the heart of a gentleman it is Rollino."

"Well! My curiosity almost reconciles me to getting out of the taxi. Where is the place?" asked Dot.

"Down in West Ninth street."

We were now spinning along the Great White Way. Dot was in a state of high excitement over the Ben-Hur chariot race done in electric to advertise. The chauffeur must pretend that something was wrong with the car while she looked at it, and she quite resented the intermission which is allowed for the horses to rest.

But there were other things in sight equally thrilling. Our theatre, for instance, there in Forty-fifth street, where Mary Maxwell was now playing, and where Dot had appeared for one blissful week in a deep thinking part, and where only the night before she had signed for her first salary, a modest sum of \$25, which was as yet too precious to be broken.

She had come home, her face looking like a sun-beam, because the manager himself had told her that she thought her part intelligently and with a good sense of comedy. She had been given the understudy to the ingénue, of whom she was most hopeful despite that young person's distressingly robust state of health.

"Still you never can tell when an accident may happen," was her cheerful view of the situation.

At last we arrived at Rollino's, a modest old red brick house, utterly unpretentious of all that Ned claimed for it. A short flight of steps led us to the door upon which a well polished brass plate marked it for the Hotel Rollino. But, to my surprise, Ned led us to the basement entrance, where he pulled upon an old fashioned knob bell that went tinkling in the far-off regions. The iron gate at the entrance was painted a dark, cool green, as were the gratings at the windows, where white muslin curtains hung. Bright coloured nasturtiums grew just outside.

But now Maria opened the door to us. She smiled a welcome. She remembered, to be sure.

We were all forthwith presented to Maria. She would tell "Miss Rollino," who would see us in just a bit while, Miss Rollino being her lord and master.

We stepped from the narrow hall into the tiniest of low celled rooms. It held just five small round tables.

There was an old fashioned gilt framed mirror between the length of the two windows. Around the walls was arranged a frieze of framed pictures, copies of old world masterpieces, photos of famous groups of sculpture from beloved Italy.

There were several original sketches signed for Rollino by the artists in a spirit of bon camaraderie in memory of happy nights at the round table, so Ned explained to us.

And now appeared Rollino himself, in his big white apron and little black skull cap and flowing Windsor tie. He was tall and rather thin, with a gentle, almost shy, countenance. But one recognized immediately a personality, one of those human creatures that are self-sufficient, a law unto themselves, a centre of force that attracts subconsciously. Rollino easily dominated his establishment and the interests of his guests.

The Caruso Sketch.

He took us into the next room, which was his kitchen, and spotlessly clean. A narrow table stretched across the centre of the room upon which

shops gossiping and enjoying the soft spring air. Children swarmed the streets, shrieking at games of tag. The inevitable hurdy-gurdy was wheezing out its merry tune, while the twinkling feet of small girls danced in abandonment of complete and unconscious joy.

Suddenly we halted.

"We are now at the entrance to Macdougall alley," Ned announced impressively.

I peered into the gloom that was lighted at odd intervals by old time hostelry lamps of large proportion in which were ancient gas jets that emitted a flickering light. At the far end, which was easily in view, stood a tall wooden wall, upon the top of which the branches of trees leaned lazily.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Look upon either side. What do you see?" demanded Ned.

Sigurd Sigismundson. He gave one look at my startled face and came forward smiling.

"You see I took you at your word, and here we are." It was Ned's voice.

I was so astonished that I merely acknowledged the introduction without mentioning the fact that I had seen Sigurd Sigismundson before. Besides it would not have been easy to explain that I had seen him but three times in my life, the last upon the roof of our apartment, and had held converse with him without benefit of introduction, but yet that the sound of his voice was as the music of the stars singing in my soul.

Rollino declared that he would mix the zabaglione and we declared that we would watch the ceremony. I was the last in leaving. Sigurd dropped the portière in front of me smilingly.

"It is cooler here," he said. "Won't you sit down?"



—and Now Appeared Rollino Himself

"I did not know that it was to your studio we were coming," I explained hurriedly.

"So I saw by your face. Neither did I know that it was you whom Ned was to bring. It's a queer world."

I gazed about the room with new interest.

"So you are an artist—a painter?"

"That I am not. Only to-day I came to this conclusion," he smiled at me with his old inscrutable smile. "What I really am, Little Wise One, is a seeker after the truth."

"Which means that you are too lazy to develop your natural talent for painting?"

He drew forth the inevitable cigarette. I nodded permission for him to smoke. I moved about restlessly.

"Well, I see a group of what appears to be college bred stables," said Mary Maxwell.

Ned laughed. "You have about hit it. They were originally stables, but now are glorified by Art, having been converted into artists' studios."

"Not really?" gasped Dot.

"Really, they are."

I felt as though I had stepped into the pages of a book. Each studio had in truth been glorified. Great doors of natural wood with old brass knockers and window boxes of flowers redeemed them from the suggestion of their lowly origin. In front of one a bay tree flourished, and from across the wall now drifted the fresh spring scent of early apple blossoms.

We came to a door that stood alluringly ajar. From within came a soft radiance that I felt to be candle light, and I was right; for, to my delight, Ned opened wide the door for us to enter.

Such a curious room! It was barbaric. It was Eastern, but most of all it possessed the bare and simple dignity of an ancient Norse dwelling, the throne room of some old Norwegian King. Above the mantle was an enormous painting of Thor, the Norwegian Thunder God.

The few pieces of furniture were of black walnut, a magnificent tiger skin was flung upon a chair, three others were upon the floor. Upon one wall and framed hung a Persian rug which, judging from its ornamental position, I inferred was many birthdays old. In one dim corner stood a battle steed in regalia of heavy rose silk trappings and mounted upon him the figure of a Japanese feudal prince in full armor.

Sigurd Sigismundson.

There were three very old Greek vases and near the door an incense burner of beaten gold from some old Hindoo temple.

I was drawn toward a low table to examine a marvellously perfect crystal held in a dragon's claw. It was of Japanese workmanship. I was surprised at sight of a certain small book that lay near it, a very old copy of Shelley's poems, the fac-simile of one that I possessed. It had been given to me by an old man whom I had befriended once in need, an old man who from his appearance might himself have been some Norwegian noble.

But where was our host?

The draperies were pushed aside and there stood—

"Come and sit down," he said, and I obeyed him. He stood leaning against the mantel and looking down at me.

"I am going to tell you a story, Little Wise One. Perhaps you can understand. Once long ago in Norway there was a painter who had a very great talent and a very beautiful wife, usually a most satisfying combination of blessings. But in his case the wife was not exactly a blessing. She broke his life and well nigh killed his creative force. She did not mean to do this. It was just her nature to destroy. Then after she had wrought this havoc in his life she bore him a son in whose heart was all the agony of maimed creative desire from the father with just enough of the mother's nature so that the children of his brain should always be stillborn."

Sigurd drew toward him a small brass tray and carefully knocked the ashes from his cigarette into it. I waited in silence for him to go on.

"Several years ago the son went to Paris. Soon after for some reason the parents quarrelled bitterly and separated. The father gave her everything, as he had always done, and he himself taught painting for a living. Then the mother died suddenly, and when the son returned to Norway the father had gone away, leaving no message. But he is not dead. He is somewhere in the world and, you see, the son wants him, needs him; thinks that, perhaps, they two together might after all conquer the mother's influence. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," I answered. "But you could conquer alone, Sigurd, if you would, even though you never found your father, if only you would fight hard enough."

He looked at me strangely. We heard the others returning.

"Do you believe that, Little Wise One? Perhaps I could win if you would help me, if you will believe in me."

"Listen, if I win out within the next three months will you marry me?"

"Sigurd!" I put him away with my two hands, but his arms were about me.

"Will you?" he whispered.

"Yes," I gasped. "Oh!" for I received a most unsatisfactory kiss somewhere in the neighborhood of my ear and had just had time to become intensely interested in the Hindoo incense burner when in came Rollino and the rest bearing the zabaglione in triumph, and well they may have borne it so. It tasted something like an egg nog hot, only it was much more delicate because it was made with Marsala wine.

We drank to Rollino—long life and prosperity, which, as Sigurd explained, was but another way of drinking to art, since without Rollino many a struggling young artist would have gone without a much needed meal; perhaps so many meals that the struggle would not have seemed worth while.

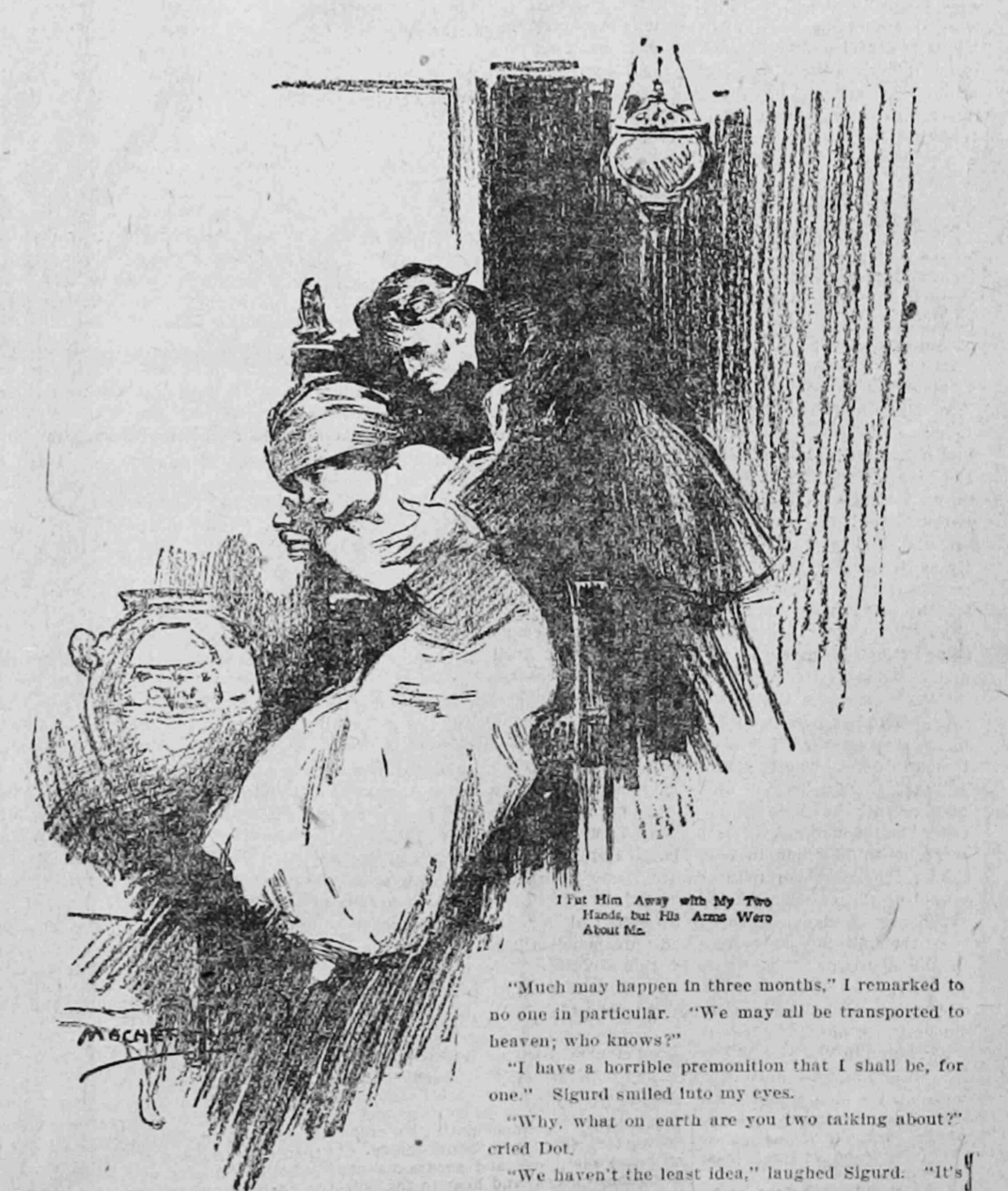
Rollino was much embarrassed at such allusion; in fact, denied all knowledge of such good deeds.

So we drank again to Rollino, the kind and generous one, the music loving, who, like that poet-soldier Cyrano de Bergerac, has ever been but the prompter in the shadow, yet who can say with the Gascony cadet, "It is well; I am content."

Now our taxicab arrived and we clambered in, Rollino declining to be driven home. He had some engagement elsewhere, he declared.

"You are not leaving soon, Ned?" Sigurd asked.

"To-morrow," Ned replied, gazing dolefully at Mary Maxwell. "But I shall return in a week's time," he added more hopefully, "and I think that business will detain me here for about three months."



That Him Away with My Two Hands, but His Arms Were About Me.

"Much may happen in three months," I remarked to no one in particular. "We may all be transported to heaven; who knows?"

"I have a horrible premonition that I shall be, for one," Sigurd smiled into my eyes.

"Why, what on earth are you two talking about?" cried Dot.

"We haven't the least idea," laughed Sigurd. "It's the zabaglione!"